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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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119

10 December 1967

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

Sharp fighting was reported in widely scattered areas of South Vietnam over the weekend. In the delta, South Vietnamese forces claim to have killed over 400 Viet Cong in a battle in Chuong Thien Province.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
South Vietnamese troops claim to have killed 451 Viet Cong guerrillas in a Mekong Delta battle which began on 8 December and continued sporadically over the weekend. Sharp fighting was also reported near the Demilitarized Zone, in Quang Nam Province south of Da Nang, in Binh Dinh Province, and near An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province (Paras. 1-5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

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the Upper House has voted to draft an amnesty bill covering certain persons arrested since 1 November 1963 (Paras. 5-7). A Viet Cong captive has provided a description of the difficulties involved in carrying out Communist political activities in a contested area (Paras. 8-12).

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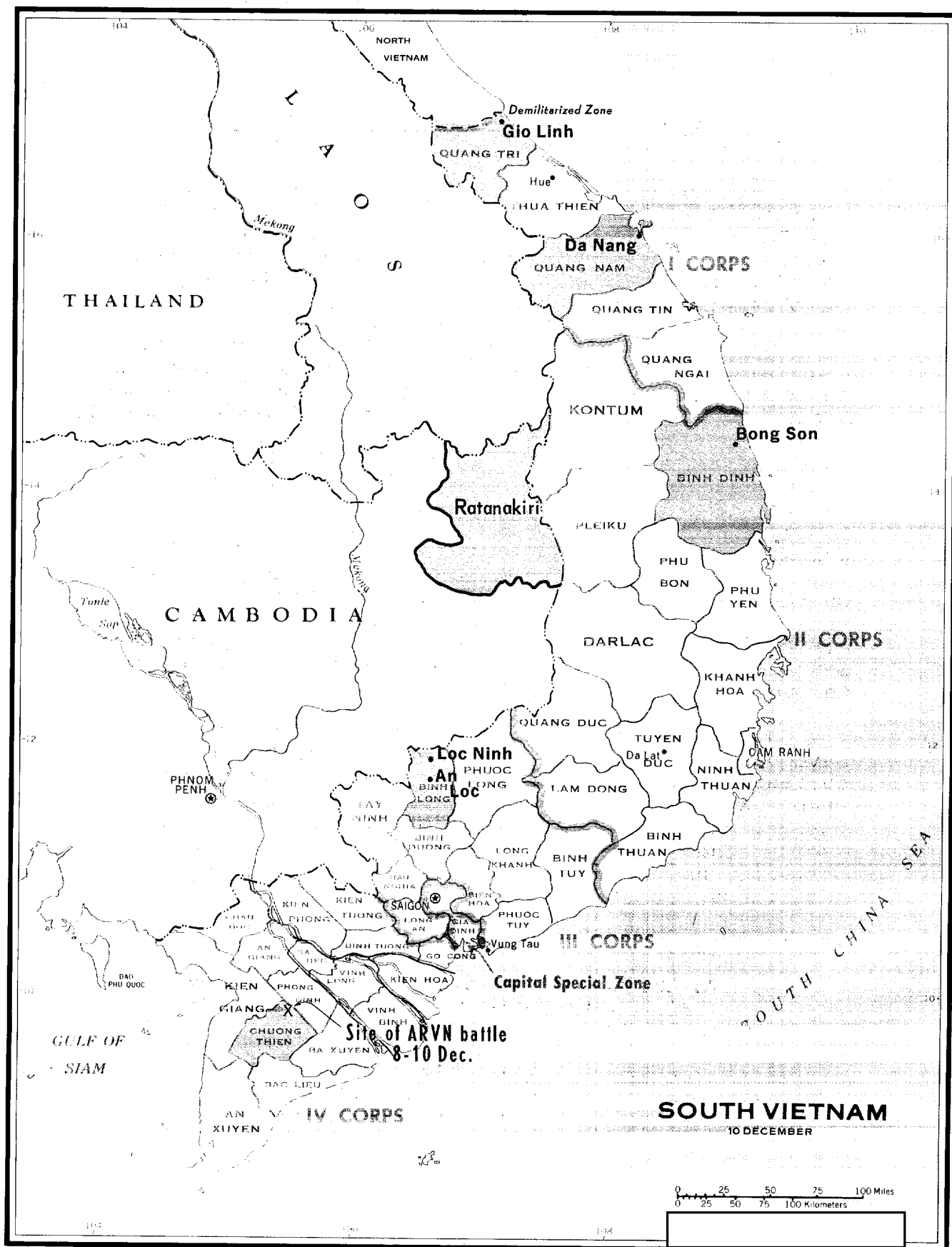
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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The Chinese have upgraded the Liberation Front office in Peking to a diplomatic mission (Paras. 1-2). Comments by Front spokesmen are reported (Paras. 3-6). The Liberation Front has issued a statement supporting its call for holiday truces (Para. 7).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. South Vietnamese infantrymen and rangers claim to have killed 451 Viet Cong guerrillas in a Mekong Delta battle which began on 8 December in Chuong Thien Province and continued sporadically over the weekend. Sixty South Vietnamese died in the fighting and 102 were wounded. Five US advisers were also wounded in the engagement.

2. The fighting in Chuong Thien, the second major action in the delta in a week, began when two battalions of the South Vietnamese 21st Division came under heavy fire while moving down both sides of the O Mon Canal. Three additional South Vietnamese Ranger battalions were quickly moved into the battle area to reinforce the attacking ARVN forces. Fighting continued throughout the day, and during the night of 8-9 December heavy air and artillery strikes were directed at the Viet Cong positions. On the morning of 9 December, small groups of Viet Cong were sighted attempting to withdraw. Additional air strikes were called in and the advancing government battalions continued to meet sporadic resistance throughout that day and the next.

3. Elements of three Viet Cong battalions have been identified in the fight, an unusual occurrence in the delta where for several months the enemy has operated for the most part in company size formations, launching occasional battalion-size attacks. The units engaged were the 303rd Main Force Battalion and the U-Minh-10 and Tay Do Local Force battalions, all veterans of numerous delta battles.

Other Actions

4. To the north of Saigon near An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province, soldiers from the US 1st Infantry Division reported killing 124 North Vietnamese troops as the enemy unsuccessfully attempted to overrun a US artillery fire support base on 10 December. One American was killed and 31 were wounded in the battle. Captured documents tentatively

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identify the enemy unit as an element of the North Vietnamese 165th Regiment. This unit was last engaged in battle between 29 October and 3 November in the vicinity of Loc Ninh, about 14 miles north of this most recent action.

5. Sharp fighting was also reported over the weekend in the coastal plains south of Da Nang and farther north near Gio Linh, the allied strongpoint just below the Demilitarized Zone. In the fighting south of Da Nang, US 1st Cavalry troops report killing 94 enemy soldiers over the weekend while suffering relatively light losses themselves. In the action near Gio Linh, ten South Vietnamese and 45 North Vietnamese troops died in a clash on 9 December. The latter fight developed when South Vietnamese patrols ran into an estimated company-size enemy force which had moved into well-fortified positions less than two miles northwest of Gio Linh. Meanwhile, continued skirmishes in the Bong Son plains of northern Binh Dinh Province have raised the enemy casualty count there to 252 dead in three days of fighting. US losses in this sector have been reported as relatively light.

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II. POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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National Assembly Activities

5. The Lower House voted on 7 December to set the minimum membership for formation of an officially recognized bloc at 14. This would permit as many as nine blocs in the 137-member house and is proportionately

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similar to the 12-member requirement of the former Provisional National Assembly. The 60-man Upper House, by contrast, has set its minimum at 15, allowing only four blocs.

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7. In other National Assembly developments, the Upper House on 7 December heard a report from Senator Tran Van Don's special committee to review clemency appeals submitted to the senate. Don reported that, since the committee's establishment in mid-November, 107 cases had been reviewed. Twenty of these involved persons implicated in the coups or attempted coups of 30 January 1965, 19 February 1965, and 20 May 1965, and in the government's move on 30 June 1966 against struggle movement forces in Da Nang. During the ensuing debate, the Upper House voted to draft an amnesty bill covering certain categories of persons arrested since the overthrow of the Diem regime on 1 November.

Political Difficulties in Contested Areas

8. A Viet Cong captive [redacted] has described difficulties encountered in carrying out Communist political activities in a particular area controlled by neither the Viet Cong nor the government. The source's description is probably typical of the many areas in South Vietnam which can claim effective control by neither side. It is probably safe to assume that the government encounters equal difficulty with its own efforts in such regions [redacted]

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9. As an example of the problems involved, the captive, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] described his own efforts at indoctrination of the local populace. Extreme caution must be exercised, he said, in order that neither the Viet Cong cadres nor the people themselves will run afoul of the government agents and soldiers who frequently enter the area.

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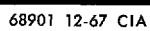
10. In the source's own area, full indoctrination sessions were abandoned in early 1967 because of the increasing risk, and the Communists had to resort to speaking to persons or families singly in a house-to-house canvas. The source had previously been able to gather as many as ten families together safely for a propaganda session.

11. Difficulties were still encountered, however, as many people refused to open their doors to the Viet Cong cadres because they feared government reprisals. The Communists, further, were unable to determine what effect their indoctrination had on the local inhabitants because no effective control measures existed. Viet Cong agents could not live in the hamlet to oversee the execution of Viet Cong policies, and even those people known to be Communist sympathizers and supporters could not be rewarded because of the danger of government discovery.

12. This example also points up the extreme pressure exerted upon local inhabitants who probably in many cases favor neither the Communists nor the government. As a result, either they are forced into actions simply out of fear or they refuse to cooperate with either side, making progress equally difficult for the Viet Cong and the government.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTSChinese Grant Liberation Front Diplomatic Status

1. According to a Hanoi announcement, the Chinese have upgraded the Liberation Front representation in Peking to the status of a diplomatic mission, placing it on a par with other diplomatic posts in the country. On 5 December Hanoi radio, in reporting a Peking reception honoring the new Front representative, quoted Premier Chou En-lai as stating that China "regards the NFLSV permanent mission in China as an official diplomatic mission." On 10 December, Hanoi issued a statement warmly praising the Chinese action and quoted a Liberation Front announcement claiming that this new status "further raised the international prestige of the NFLSV, the only genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people" and thanking the Chinese for their "wholehearted" moral and material assistance.

2. Peking's action is in keeping with the considerable official and propaganda support it has rendered the Front over the years. Such support has included giving Front representatives exalted positions, sometimes above representatives of Hanoi, at meetings and diplomatic functions. China is the third country to grant the Front such diplomatic status. Cuba and Cambodia did so in June of this year and other nations where the Front currently enjoys representation may follow suit.

Comments by Front Spokesmen

3. Liberation Front spokesmen are continuing to emphasize the reasonableness and acceptability of their new program and to imply that more than a cessation of the bombing of the North is necessary to bring about conditions for ending the war in the South.

4. Nguyen Van Tien, the Front representative in Hanoi who is currently in Europe, stated in a 5 December interview on the French radio that the

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first gesture required to bring about favorable conditions for peace is the cessation of the bombing of the North. He stressed, however, that US acceptance of the Front's objectives is necessary before the fighting in the South can be ended. He defined these objectives as "the cessation of the aggression against us, the cessation of the bombing, the withdrawal of all US and satellite troops from the South, and recognition of the Front."

5. Much the same line was adopted by the Front representative in Prague, Ha Thanh Lam, in a recent interview in the Italian press, only a portion of which has yet been received. Lam demanded that the US stop the bombing of the North unconditionally but insisted that the NFLSV will continue to fight until the US agrees to withdraw. Both Tien and Lam side-stepped the question of how such a withdrawal would be carried out or whether an agreement to withdraw was sufficient to get negotiations under way.

6. In his interview, Lam also provided an outline for the period of transition after the time when the Front has presumably come to power and has promulgated a new constitution. Drawing on the precepts of the new Front program, which stress neutralism, Lam claimed the NFLSV will reconstruct the country, give the South an independent foreign policy, accept help from all countries, and approach the issue of unification with the North gradually over a period of several years. By way of illustrating the Front's willingness to cooperate with other political elements in the South, Lam claimed that the Front is ready to "support and respect" the democratic front of defeated presidential candidate, Duong Dinh Dzu. Dzu has several times been cited in Front statements and propaganda as the type of individual in the "Saigon establishment" who would be welcome.

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Liberation Front on Holiday Truce

7. The Liberation Front has issued a lengthy statement stressing the humanitarian nature of its proposal for truce periods at Christmas, New Year and Tet and calling upon South Vietnamese troops to "force their superiors" to observe the Front's order for a suspension of military attacks. The statement broadcast on 8 December claimed that the South Vietnamese Government "together with their US bosses" are attempting to undermine the Front's initiative for a suspension of military attacks. It pointed out that the Thieu-Ky "clique" has been obliged to pretend to talk about a cease-fire "in order to fool public opinion and to cope with the Front's good will" but that it has had to acquiesce to the US view "proving that it has no right to solve problems dealing with our people's feelings." The statement ended by stressing the Communists' resolve not to let the "enemy" carry out provocative acts or to take advantage of the suspension of military attacks.

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